

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT
LAWRENCE

INFORMANT: PHIL BONACORSI
INTERVIEWER: YILDEREY ERDENER
DATE: APRIL 18, 1988

Y = YILDEREY
P = PHIL

SG-LA-T513

Y: Um, [sound of a cookoo clock in background] would you tell me about your birth place, and just [unclear] for your birthplace and date? When uh (--)

P: I was born in [Trecastagnie], Italy, May 30th, 1902.

Y: Can you spell the name of the place?

P: Trecagnie? Yes. T r e c a g n i e, I guess. I'm pretty sure.

Y: Is it in south?

P: It's in the south of Italy, in Sicily.

Y: Oh, you're Sicilian?

P: Yeah, yes.

Y: 1890?

P: I was born in 1902.

Y: 1902. Yeah. And um, when did you come?

P: I came here to this country on June 19th, 1905.

Y: Oh, so you were a little baby. Three(--)

P: I was three years old. (Y: three years old) Three years old. We were a big family of

fourteen children, see. Seven were born over there, seven were born in this country. See what I mean? Yeah.

Y: [Chuckles] Yeah. And the oldest seven children, you were the first?

P: No! No! My father came to this country first with my two older brother, and my oldest sister. See? And then he sent for us a year later. See? There was uh, the next was uh, there was one, Fred, and then me, Joe, he was the youngest one. Yeah, there's five of us. (Y: Five boys?) That came with my mother. Five boys, yes. Yes. And then when we came here, the others were born here, see.

Y: Umhm. So he came first.

P: Yes, in 1904.

Y: 1904, a then came, went back to Sicily?

P: No, he sent for us (Y: money), we came. Yeah. (Y: Yeah) We came.

Y: Your mother and (--)

P: And five boys. (Y: Yeah) Yeah.

Y: So obviously you don't remember how you came? I mean three years old is pretty young.

P: Oh no, I don't remember much about Italy. No, I can't remember that.

Y: Do you remember any family story, how, you know, there are always stories how people came from other old country. I mean on the way, any difficulties?

P: Oh, they uh, in them days you know, people, the ships, you know, before Harvey discovered the lines you know, that they traveled. Today [unclear], before Harvey discovered them, people used to, the ships used to get lost. I had a mother-in-law, when she come here, they were at sea six months before they made it to the country. They had a hardshop you know, with steerage, you know, of course, four people, you know? And they were pretty tough conditions. Of course I don't remember them, you know. Only I was told by my mother and my grandmother, and people of course, older people, see? You know.

Y: But it did not take six months for you to come here?

P: No, no, no, no, no. No, I don't know how long it took. It might have taken maybe two, not ten, twelve days maybe? You know?

Y: Yeah, who knows.

P: The [Canapick?]. I know it was the [Canapick?].

Y: Yeah. And your father came to Lawrence direct? Or?

P: Well he came to Lawrence directly, yes.

Y: Yeah. He was working also, right?

P: Well he was working here, sure. He was working in the mills. And my two oldest brothers and sister were working also, you know? And uh, he took my oldest sister naturally to do the cooking and the housework, you know? And she, she might have been about sixteen you know, at the time, you know? And uh, but they worked, you know, and as soon as he got enough money he sent for us.

Y: What number are you? I mean you are not the oldest?

P: No, no. There's uh, I'm around #7. I can tell you. There's John, Jim, [Centa?], [Blaise?], Fred, [Def?] and me, seven. I was number seven.

Y: Yeah. Seven, and then the (--)

P: And then the other set, another one, the eighth kid, he was a little baby, 18 months coming over from the old country. The one next to me, see? In fact I can show you a family picture if you want to see it.

Y: Yeah, I'd like to. I would like to see it? So you are in the middle exactly?

P: Yeah, I'm in the middle exactly. The seventh, yeah.

Y: So you all grew up in Lawrence?

P: In Lawrence, yeah. Yeah.

Y: Yeah. Can you tell me a little bit about your, when you grew up, you know? When you were growing up where did you live the first time? Do you remember where you lived in Lawrence?

P: Yes, yes. The first time I lived there I can remember, was on Essex Street, see. There was a brick house, a brick cottage, see? And of course we moved a few times due to the fact, as the family got bigger you'd need more space, you know? And uh, so we lived on Essex Street. And I remember one time my uh, one of my brother's, there was a delicatessen on Essex Street, you know, across the street from where we lived, you know? And he used to like the ham over there. And my mother going there was raining. And uh, being a little boy, I must have been four years old. You know, I saw her lift, little boys used to wear skirts in them days, dresses you know. (Y: Yeah) Yeah. And uh, so she lifted her dress, so I lifted mine in the rain, you know, you follow what you see, you know? Kids, you know? And uh, but then from there we went to Union Street, near Brook Street, 122-124 Union Street. It was a big house with big, two big

garrets you know? They got garrets, Christ you could put enough storage in there on both sides, you now? And the Mayor, the Mayor of the city there early, used to own that house, you know? And we lived there quite awhile. Then from there we moved to Summer Street on a brick house at 24 Summer Street.

Y: You remember all of these numbers?

P: Oh yes.

Y: I don't remember where I lived (--)

P: Yeah, yeah, I remember that. And then my mother, oh I should say it'd be about 1914, or 15, they bought a house, a brick house, you know? You know, it was one of those that they're together, you know what I mean? A lot of houses, you know, partner. And we bought a house up and down, you know? And we had four big rooms upstairs with all eight boys used to sleep. See? And there was three room downstairs. One for my father and mother, and one for the girls, you know, couple of girls. And uh, some of them weren't even born then, you know, my kid brother wasn't born then of course. And uh, we lived there. Well I lived there till I got married, see.

Y: Yeah. How old were you when you?

P: When I got married? (Y: Yeah) Well I was actually about twenty-five and a half. (Y: umhm) Yeah. My wife was twenty-two. Yeah.

Y: What is, what was her name?

P: Her name was [Theresa Compania?]. [Compania?] means field in English. (Y: Oh! Yeah) See, if it was translated.

Y: And she passed away huh?

P: She passes away in '82, yeah.

Y: Well uh, 25, when did you start working?

P: I started working at eleven years old.

Y: Eleven years old?

P: Yeah, you see, in them days, see I only went, I only had a fourth grade education. See, I didn't have no education.

Y: Yeah, well most of them did not have any education.

P: Yeah, yeah. Well my father and mother, they didn't have none, see? But I went to four

different schools. Four different grades, you know? (Y: Why?) I'll tell you why. Where we lived. When I lived on Essex Street, I went to the Walton School in the first grade. See? I lived on Union Street, I went to the Harrington School. Then I lived on Newbury Street, which I didn't mention before, we lived there a short while, you know? I went to the Newbury Street school, and then when we went to Summer Street, I went to the Oliver School, see? So I had four grades, four different schools. Now you say how did you work at eleven? In them days, if you were, you had to be fourteen years old. But if you were thirteen and forty weeks, they would discount the vacation you know, from school. See? And you could go to work? See? But me, my family having so many boys, and so many older coming from the old country, we work with each others papers. You see what I mean? I worked with my brother Def's papers, he was two years older than I was. See? See? So that's how I was working in the mill at eleven years old. See? Yeah.

Y: Yeah. They do the same, I'm from Turkey. They do the same thing in Turkey, you know. If I had a brother two years older than me, I would use his paper, (P: his papers) and say, I am you know, such and such. (P: Sure) And Father's name, everything is matched. So uh, and where did you start?

P: I started at the Wood Mill, and I got fired after two weeks. Do you know why? A kid, I was only a kid, eleven years old. Now in them days there was no coffee breaks, no lunch breaks inbetween, only noon hour. At noon hour you could have, you had an hour for dinner, you know, or whatever you wanted to do. Now the girls, the women used to comb their hair, you know, and they'd have to do it on the fly. If you wanted to eat something between breakfast in the morning, and lunch, you know, a little lunch, you'd have to eat it on the fly while you were working.

Y: Right. (P: See?) Yeah.

P: No this woman was combing her hair, you know.

Y: Who was this woman?

P: I don't know. You know, one of the woman that worked there. I don't know. A lot of woman, you know. They worked there. They were combing there hair and working, you know. So they had a mirror. Naturally they used a mirror, you know, girls. Naturally. So what did I do, I picked up that mirror and just flashed it at the other mill, [Fadler?] Mill. Now the Wood Mill was the biggest mill in the world. It had two sections though, you know, with tunnels that go in. (Y: Right. Umhm) In fact they took one section down now, see? But there was two sections. It was the biggest mill in the world. So I flashed it on the bricks. No harm done. But in them days a section hand could not hire you, but he could fire you. (Y: oh yeah?) See? Now he was a big Swede. I never knew why he fired me. The hell, that's nothing to fire a kid, is it? (Y: No.) No. But I found out later he hated all foreigners. See what I mean?

Y: Yeah, but I thought Wood Mill was packed of Italians.

P: Yes! Packed with Italians, but there was, but there was some Germans, there was some

Polish, there was some Lithuanians, there was, you know, there was a mix. Scotch, Irish, you know, there was (--)

Y: Yeah, I thought the Italians were the dominant group there.

P: They were the dominant group of workers, yes. Yes. But that's due to the 1907 exodus of the Italians that came here, the Irish you know? Well the Irish could get better jobs, and the Germans, because they had the same language the Irish. See? They could (--). The Italians were all immigrants. The language barrier is a terrible thing, you know what I mean? See? So they had to take the menial jobs, see?

Y: All these low paying jobs.

P: The lower paying jobs, yeah. So that's why they were mostly in the mill, see?

Y: Could you speak English when you started?

P: When I started? Well I had gone to school for four years. Yeah. So I would speak English, you know? (Y: Yeah) I could speak English. And uh so this fellow was a friend of the family, you know? In fact his son is the doctor, podiatrist now, you know? And uh, he says, where you going? I says, well I got fired! What do you mean you got fired? I said, you know, my section hand fired me. He says, come on over. I don't know how he did it. He was a husky guy. The big guy was a Swede. He got that big Swede, he picked him up, and he banged him against the machine. He said, come on, he says, I'll quit too, you know? And then I went to the Ayer Mill. I worked there about a year and a half. and uh, of course the job, kids you know, they weren't too hard for little boys, you know. Oiler boy, you know?

Y: Yeah. When did you start working? In the morning at six? I mean when did people start in those days?

P: Well the people before me, before me, they used to start from, work from six to six, twelve hours, sixty hours a week. My father worked sixty hours for three dollars and sixty cents a week before the 1912 Strike. See? See, I just got to work just after the strike. I got ten and a half cents an hour. I got more money. I got five dollars and three cents for forty-eight hours. See? Kids used to work forty-eight hours, see. See. And grown-ups used to work fifty, fifty-four hours you know, because they had brought it down from sixty to fifty-eight, you know, and then fifty-four, see? And then when of course, the forty hours came after Roosevelt as you know. You know, he brought the forty hour week, you know?. But before that you know, previous to this, like I was reading this of course, because one time I sent a congressional record of labor, you know? You know, when I was young I used to like to read stuff like that, see? And you know these mills, they always exploited people. They used to hire farm girls and farm boys. And Slater was the first man that ever put a mill in this country from England. And he really, now I forget whether it's New Bedford, or Fall River, but it's one of those two that he, the first mill. And he used to pay a sixteen year old girl for sixty hours. Ninety-cents a week, and a boy, fourteen year old boy would get sixty-cents a week, see? Talk about expectation, you know? They were tough times, believe me, you know?

Y: Yeah. I think I interrupted. You said you went to Ayer after?

P: I went to the Ayer Mill and got a job there as an oiler boy, see? (Y: Oiler boy?) Oiler boy. Yeah.

Y: What do you do?

P: Well we used to oil up the, the machines. That's, you know, the spindles, the spindles in the spinning room. I don't know if you know what they would be, see? (Y: No) But uh, and you, you'd just run with the oil can through the machines. That wouldn't take long. Only on a Wednesday, on a Wednesday you would have the toughest job, you know, which would be, would take you about four hours, five hours to do, which would be greasing the rollers, you know? But the rest, you know, wasn't too, too much, you know, for a kid, you know? Then I started working as a yarn boy. See, in fact I was the fastest yarn boy there. In fact my section hand used, picked me with the other mills, and everybody in the mill there, that I was the fastest yarn boy. I was fast, you know?

Y: What is the job of a yarn boy?

P: Yarn boy, you know, when the, when the spinning in the spinning room, the bobbin is full. (Y: Right) See? The bobbin setters, you know, the doffers rather, they pick up this, put an empty one in and put this on the rack, you know? There's spikes, see? And the yarn boy runs with the box, and picks them off into the box, see? And then runs them into the (--) (Y: Puts it into them) Yeah, yeah.

Y: How long did you work as an oiler uh (--)

P: As an oiler boy? (Y: boy, yeah) Well I think I must have been amount three months. Then I got into (Y: yarn) yarn boy.

Y: And then how long yarn boy?

P: Oh, I, I worked there for about a year and a half. Well I was always looking for a job where I could make a little more money. Then I went to, I found out I could [unclear]. And I got a job in a machine shop in North Andover, Davis and Ferber, see? (Y: Yeah) And I worked there awhile you know? And I was doing pretty good there, but there was this guy, the second hand, they all called him the grouch. He was one of those grouchy, you know?

Y: This is in machine? Machine?

P: The machine shop, yeah, North Andover, see? (Y: Umhm) And uh, he was always grouchy. So one say, there's a fellow that, the next department would tell me, hey Phil, I need a gauge, you know? He'd tell me a twenty-eight gauge, thirty-eight, thirty gauge, whenever he needs it. Well the second hand gives it to you. You got to get it from him, because he's got to make a not to give it to me. So one day the things wouldn't fit, the gauge. Romeo called me, you know, he's a fat Italian that lived in North Andover. He said, Phil, you give me the wrong thing here. He

says, you've got the cylinders running wrong. Oh, I says, that's what he gave me. So the boss came with the second hand and checked it out, and the thing was wrong. Well, I had to say, well, I says, that's what Gaffney gave me. And he couldn't deny it, because he had the note, that he got the note, see? But since then I knew he was out to get me, see? But the boss, Smith, he liked me, because they always didn't know how I never broke many tools. You know, when the cylinders used to go around from the foundary, you know, they come, they don't come smoothe, you know? Some places they're heavier than other places, you now? Well when, when they'd leave this turning, you know, and it's heavy, it goes boom, you know? And sometimes it snaps the tools, see? And the tool would be, what they called the cutting tool, the straight tool, you know? Well me as a boy, you know, I couldn't get hurt, but I know they'd stop me if they knew about it. I had a piece of leather, and I used to lay it on there and I'd hold it down so it wouldn't have, the machine would never go boom, boom, boom. And I never used to break tools. See? So anyway, one time, after about three or four months, I went to Smith. I said, Mrs. Smith, don't you think I ought to get a raise, you know? Now I expected you know, if I get it, because they used to get two or three cents, you know, I expected maybe I hope I get the two cents an hours more. He says, yes, I'll get that raise. He gave he seven cents. Jesus Christ, I was flabagasted, you know? He was good.

But then Armistice Day, or the Armistice was signed in 1918, you know? Well everybody went out of work, you know? Everybody (Y: 19, when was it?) 1918, when the first World War? You know, (Y: Yeah, right) would be Armistice, you know, declared war, you know? And everybody, you know, celebrating, you know? And I got a blood nose. Jeese, you couldn't stop it. I had to go to a drug store. I had to go watch the parade with cotton batting in my nose and all that. But then I figure I wanted to get a job with a little more money, you know? Because the family was big, you know, and I was thinking of the family, always working at something, trying to help the family out. So I got a job at the Arlington Mills. (Y: In what mills?) In the Arlington Mills. (Y: Arlington, yeah) I wanted to be a wool sorter, see? And uh, of course the wool sorters made more money, but I didn't know that it was a seasonable job, you know? You know what I mean? But I took a chance, you know? I said, maybe you have, pretty good. And of course in them days, the wool sorters was the highest paid job in the mill. One of the highest paid jobs in the mill. The wool sorters used to make forty-five bucks a week, see? That was big money according to our way of things. And uh, so anyway, I says, I want to be an apprentice. The boss wouldn't give me a chance. But then he died and the second hand, and Irishman became a boss. And he give me a chance, see. And he liked me, you know? And uh, so, well I was getting fifteen dollars a week, but he reduced it to thirteen dollars a week, you know, when you're an apprentice, see, for, for six months. Then you'd get raises every six months. You get a raise till you get you know, full money, see? So I worked there forty-seven years off and on, you know?

Y: Isn't Arlington also a woolen?

P: Yeah, that's a woolen mills, yes.

Y: Woolen mills. It did not belong to the American Woolen Company?

P: No, it was not the American, no. Franklin Hobbs was the owner of the company, see.

Y: But you did more or less the same things what people did in Wood mill, or whatever.

P: That's right. The Wood Mill had a wool shop too. (Y: right) The Pacific had a wool shop. But the Arlington Mill made more money than they did. We made four dollars and forty-five cents a week more than the other wool sorters, you know? I don't know why, but we did, you know?

Y: Yeah. Well anyway you saw so many different mills, you know? You started Wood Mill, and then Ayer Mill a little bit, and then machine shop, and then to Arlington Mill. I'm interested to know you know, how things changed during, how many years you worked in Arlington?

P: Oh, forty-seven years.

Y: Forty-seven years, yeah. I mean it is almost a half century.

P: Sure.

Y: And how have things changed from the beginning when you started in Wood Mill for example? Did uh, that was 1913 I guess, because you said you were eleven years old. So uh, short after the strike.

P: The 12 strike, yeah.

Y: And uh, so how were the machines when you started in Wood Mill? They were all manually operated, or?

P: Well when I first worked the mills, there, the Wood and the Ayer Mill, see, because the machines were manual. They used to put with belts, you know? They weren't electric machines, you know? No. They were runned with belts, you know? In fact I saw a belt break. They used to break occasionally. And a guy used to put these iron clips, you know, to fix a belt, you know? And I saw one hit a Syrian girl in the eye. I don't know whatever became of her, because I [unclear], and she must have lost here eye, or something. You know, that poor girl, you know? But where I worked in the wool shop there was no machinery then. See?

Y: What was it then?

P: No, we, we sorted the, you see, the wool as it's clipped from the sheep, (Y: Oh, I see, yeah) see? It comes to us first. (Y: Yeah) And we sort it out in different grades. You see what I mean? Fine wools, medium wools, light, every [unclear] you know, we sort it out. That was a skilled job, you know? (Y: Yeah) But in the end they took all the skill out of it. They started blending it different, because when we used to sort it, they used to make it like a layer cake. They used to [unclear] the bins, and put so much of this and so much of this, and the batchmen, it was a tough job, because I did it too, you know? And they'd have to cut it down like this, you know, the boxes, so they've have an even quantity of each grade, see? But now in the end the mills went out, and then Mariner come in and he had belts. He had guys stringing the wool, throwing them on the belts, and there was a couple of guys trying to get out some of the heavy

stuff. The rest would just go in. And they'd, they'd take a micro, micron, and it if needed some of this, and some of this, they'd add it, you know, that's all. It became a different job all together, you know.

Y: I mean where did your father work? In the Wood Mill?

P: My father worked in the Everett Mill. for a little while, see?

Y: It's a cotton mill, right?

P: Yeah, that was the cotton mill. But he didn't work too long, because he couldn't. My father with a bunch of kids like that, he always was a box, big box carrying food. You'd go to the stores and carrying food, and helping my mother prepare it, you know, and things like that, see?

Y: So your mother also worked huh?

P: No, my mother never worked.

Y: Well with fourteen children?

P: No, my mother never worked. My mother had enough to do, believe me! [Chuckles]

Y: Yeah, and uh, so in 19, 1918 you were then (P: sixteen years old) sixteen years old. And uh, did the production increase in those years, because of the World War? I mean did you work harder, or different schedules?

P: Oh yeah, as you sent along production got higher. Yeah. In the jobs that I worked. The jobs that I worked in the wool shop, production came real, a lot higher, you know? We used to call what they call a drive, you know? Instead of being, before we used to be on boards, we all had individual boards, you know? And we probably do maybe 1800, 1900 pounds a day each, you know? And then when the drives come in, gosh we were three men on a board. Christ sake, we'd probably do 20,000 pounds a day, you know? It's a big difference, big difference.

Y: Yeah, I'm coming closer because my [unclear].

P: It's all right. Okay, yeah.

Y: Uh, so in 1920's all these cotton mills, they shut down and they went south.

P: They went south, yeah.

Y: And your father is working Everett Mill?

P: Yeah, he only works for a short time, you know?

Y: And then what did he do?

P: He didn't do nothing. He was just carrying in food and help and prepare, you know, as the boys start, we start working, you know, he didn't have to, you know what I mean?

Y: Yeah, yeah. (P: See?) Yeah.

P: As we grew, you know (--)

SIDE ONE ENDS

SIDE TWO BEGINS.

P: ...stores, and they used to trust people. See? Today you'd be out of luck. See? Like for instance, when I got married I uh, we went to this Cohen, you know, Mr. Cohen, and uh, bought furniture. Jesus, we owed \$1450.00 to him along. That was a lot of money in them days, you know? And we went one Saturday to tell him, you know, I'd say Mr. Cohen, we can't give you nothing this week, I'm not working. You know? He'd say, all right Mr. Bonacorsi, I know you'll pay, you know? They used to trust. The stores used to trust people. Because uh, I remember one time, oh as boys, you know, going to school. And there was a shoe store on Essex Street. And uh, this man was a Jewish man, smoking a cigarette. That's the way the foreigners used to smoke this way before, you know? And uh, so my father had me, and my brother and [unclear], you know? He thought he was going to go into the ideal market to get something they had sold them a little cheaper or something, you know? But no luck. So anyway, this man was in front of a store all dressed up, and he said to my father, why don't you get the boy some shoes for school, see? So my father don't know what he said. He said, what did he say? He said, why don't you get us some shoes for school. He said, tell them I ain't got no money, you know? He says, I'll see what happens before you go to school, you know? So the man said, tell him to come in. So my father said, what? He said he wants us to go in. And he said, look it, buy the boys shoes and you'll pay me how you can. A quarter a week, ten cents a week, a dollar a week, all at one time, the way you want. He says, I trust you. You see, in them days even though my father never knew him, but they knew people. They knew he had a big family and they trusted people. You know, used to go in the little stores and trust. And they, very few that trimmed them, you know what I mean? They were all honest people that would want to pay back, you know? And they did, you know? Maybe once in awhile you'll get uh, you know, one of them, but they were good, you know? They were good. you know, you take them Jews, and the Armenians, they help people. They used to go house to house with one of these leather suitcases, you know, selling women goods for the home, you know? Blankets, sheets, things like that. A quarter a week, you know. Stuff like that, you know?

Y: What do they sell? Sheets and uh (--)

P: Sheets, blankets, stockings, you know, all the stuff like that, you know?

Y: Well I mean in those depression years, so your wife, she was working also?

P: My wife tried to help, but she didn't work much, you know? But she helped a bit, you know, when you know, she used to work one week out of eight, you know. Things were tough, you know? And you know, the first, when I got married, the present I got after two weeks, I got laid off for eight and a half, nine and a half months, you know, no work. (Y: Wow! What did you do) Gee, I could, and I could do anything! Trust, trust, you know. Trust, stores you know, and they trust me, you know? Sometimes I have some friends that had some money, and I'd say could you loan me something? And you know?

Y: Italians. Sicilians, or (--)

P: Sicilian. Oh, even from Naples, I had friends from Naples, you know, too. I know one guy that had, you know, he was a builder. He helped me sometimes, you know. And we were good friends. They'd say, gee, I need a couple of hundred bucks for awhile, could you help me out? Sure Phil, you know? You know.

Y: What about, I hear that associations, like clubs and so, they also helped individuals like uh, I don't know, was there any Italian Club, or Association Club, or you know, social clubs?

P: Oh there was a lot of socials clubs in Lawrence. Italian, one time there was fifty Italian clubs in Lawrence. (Y: Fifty?) Fifty. All little clubs, you know? (Y: Yeah) But there was one, one club that had a bigger club, you know? Like now they have what they called the sons of Italy. You know? (Y: Yeah) Yeah. And there was the uh, the Toilers, you know, they were pretty big clubs, but they helped sometimes the people.

Y: Did you belong to any of those?

P: No, I didn't belong to those two organizations. I belonged to other clubs, you know, but I knew it. (Y: Two what?) Two, another club, you know, a smaller club, you know?

Y: Smaller club? I was wondering you know, how, how did people feel about these insecure jobs? You know, you get married, I mean you are not the only person. I am sure many others. You get married and then two weeks later, or two months later you don't know what will happen. So you were laid off. How did they feel do you think?

P: Oh it was terrible! It was a terrible thing. But you know I could lift a house. I was a pretty strong guy. When I was younger I knew I could work and I was a good worker even if I say it myself. I was a damn good worker. I'd try anything you know to try to get a job, you know. And I got some odd jobs, you know? I got some odd jobs. Maybe a couple of days here, a couple of days here, and couple of days there. I worked in Medford for oh, one time for about six days. In fact I said to the boss, kidding, now I'm only kidding, I says, will you work Sundays, you know? I says, are you going to pay me double time? I'm only kidding. He said, sure, I'll pay double time. And he did! You know? And but I picked up a couple of scatchy jobs like that. In [unclear] was a company that came from Medford, Gillette, you now?

Y: Where did you live when you (-- (P: Roma's. What?) When you got married, where did you live? Do you remember? (P: Yes) First house?

P: The first house I was on Belmont Street. It was a nice place. Nice house. Nice street.

Y: Nice street? And did you have, you did not have refrigerators in those days?

P: No, ice box.

Y: What did you do?

P: Ice box. (Y: Ice box?) Yup. And you had to depend on the iceman to come you know, and uh (--)

Y: Did they come?

P: Well sometimes they used to come late at night. Sometimes you didn't get it at all, you know? And uh, so you'd have to do with(--) You didn't have much stuff like you do today. You know what I mean? You couldn't You know? In the first you never had the money to buy this stuff, you know? And you do the best you could, you know?

Y: Did you have, or did people have ice boxes at work place? I mean in the mills, or in the machine shop you worked? (P: No!) Ice box is just for home use?

P: Just for home use, yeah. There was nothing in the mills. No ice boxes there. Not in them days. No way.

Y: I mean I understand people took their sandwiches and lunch. Where did they put those things?

P: Oh he just kept it in your pocket, or something like that. You'd have a sandwich and you put it in your pocket, that's all.

Sure. You had no place to keep it cold, or warm in them days, you know? Even the water, you know, we used to drink out of a faucet, out of the wall. It must have been canal water. It was stinking, you know, until I got to the Ayer Mill after the Wood Mill, then we got Spring Water. We used to pay ten cents a piece, you know, all the workers, you know, to get the five gallons of spring water, you know?

Y: And uh, I'm thinking also the washing machine was not (--)

P: Oh, we didn't have (--)

Y: How did your wife wash all these clothes? I mean (--)

P: By hand. (Y: By hand?) By hand, you know. You, the old uh, washboard, the washboard.

Y: Yeah. You did not have (--)

P: My mother, my wife, you know, they used washboards. Sure.

Y: And uh, uh, tell me about the changes a little bit. I mean uh, you know the nineteen thirty-five you said Roosevelt came in.

P: Umhm, shortened, made the forty hour week.

Y: Forty hour a week? (Y: Yeah) Yeah. And then social security (P: social security came) came. (P: A couple of years later, yeah) I mean did it change your attitude? You know, did you feel somehow secure, or (--)

P: Well you felt a little more secure of course, with unemployment, you know? (Y: Yeah) Then there was unemployment, see? You know, if you were laid off at least you got unemployment for so many weeks. When I, when it first started I used to get thirteen dollars a week for uh, I forget, for I think it was fourteen to fifteen weeks that I got, you know? Some people get more, some people get less. It all depends what they earned, you know?

Y: Yeah. So it was social security?

P: That was unemployment.

Y: Unem, oh, that's uh (--)

P: That's unemployment, see. That's different from social security see. Social security if when you're sixty-five and you retire, this is when you're out of work, you know? They give you unemployment, you know?

Y: So if they fired you, you got unemployment?

P: Yeah, if you're fired, if you're fired they penalize you, or if you quit they penalize you so many weeks. See? But if you were, you know, no work, you'd get unemployment, you know?

Y: The same amount of money more or less?

P: Yeah, same amount, yeah.

Y: For how long? As long as (--)

P: Well as I say, it all depends how much you had worked, you know, and how much (--) I remember mine used to be about oh, yeah, that's what it was, thirteen dollars for fifteen weeks, you know? What the hell. It wasn't a hell of a lot, but in them days you do something with it, you know?

Y: Yeah, after the unions came in, could they still fire you easily?

P: Not easily. Not easily. You'd have to do something drastic, you know? But the unions used

to protect them. Of course I'll tell you about the unions, see. Now I believe in unions, see, but at one time they were needed very badly. But now some unions are too greedy.

Y: You mean today?

P: Yes. (P: Yeah) See what I mean? Now you take for instance, whether it's the plumbers, or carpenters, mechanics, television men, they were all too greedy. They're getting big money, but they're penalizing the poor guy. He's got to pay the prices that they pay. They don't pay any more for a dozen, or a loaf of bread than the guy that gets two-fifty an hour, or three dollars an hour. You see what I mean? Things are out of balance too much, you know, which is unfair. You know? They should bring that up a little bit, see? (Y: Yeah) See, like now we're just, we're talking. You go to, like most of us old timers, we have a lot of medication. Believe me they kill you on doctors. But the medication, every time you go for your, god damn thing jumps up. Today mine was fifty-eight dollars. The other week, the other day, I think it was last Thursday or something, it was \$105.00, you know? It's a lot of medication for the, what we, what we get. See? I only get \$539.00 a month. That's not easy to get by on today, you know what I mean? Well it's tough times.

Y: Yeah. Did you belong to any of these unions?

P: Well I was, yeah, I belonged to unions, yeah. When I worked in, oh yeah, I worked in, for about three months I worked for uh, oh my God I can't think of the name. (Y: Whatever) Yeah, in Waltham, you know one of these companies like uh, Avco and you know, stuff like that. Raytheon. Raytheon.

Y: Oh, you worked there?

P: I worked there for about three months.

Y: When was it?

P: Oh, this was in 1952, or '52 to '53.

Y: Where, where did it located at the time?

P: Where I worked was in Waltham, Mass. See, and the thing was too much. And I worked six days a week. I worked afternoons you know, till well you might say nights, you know? I used to go in from I think it was two o'clock, and I used to work till oh, I think it was five o'clock the next morning.

Y: Yeah. What did you do?

P: Well the job was simple what I had, what they called, oh my God, I can't think of the name, but testing tubes, you know?

Y: Testing tubes?

P: Testing tubes. It was an easy job, you know what I mean? You put a tube in there, and you have a graph, you know. And it tells you on the picture, if the thing gets off, you know, you're rejected. So one time (--)

Y: So the, if the needle is off?

P: Off, you know, that it shows too much off the graph, (Y: yeah) yeah. (Y: It means the tube is not good) The tube is unfit, you know? (Y: Uh huh) So you should reject it. In fact one time I rejected a few tubes, you know? So the engineers came over to me, two of them. What are you rejecting these tubes for? Well I says, they're rejects. So my supervisor, he was a fellow from North Chelmsford, you know. And I said, Tom, these guys are complaining that I rejected too many tubes. I said, but they're rejects as far as I'm concerned. So, well he said, let's check them out. So we checked them out. He says, Phil, they are rejects. Well he said, I'm going to have a word with Tom Conley. You now? He was my boss, see? So when Tom Conley came by because he came by every night, you know? He had been around. And uh, Tom told him. So he came over to me, he said, Phil, I understand about these rejects. I'd like to see them. Well I showed him they were rejects. He said, now strip the machine. He wanted me to strip the machine and set it up again to see if I was doing the machine right, see? (Y: umhm) Well he said, you did that perfect, you know? Now he said, let's try out the tubes. He said, uh, of course, he said, Jesus Christ them are rejects. I says, what can I do? These guys are complaining? Well you tell them to come and see me! I'll, I'll tell them off, you know? Because you know, a tube that was a reject, when you get on one of these \$8,000 things, war, war things, you know? The thing won't work! You know what I mean? (Y: Yeah) So anyway, that (--)

Y: Were they expensive tubes?

P: Oh sure, \$8,000.

Y: That's what you said.

P: No, I mean no. The part, the tube goes into this thing, I forgot what the hell they called them. It was something about the war, you know? It cost \$8,000, you know? And with that thing not working, that little tube not working, the damn thing wouldn't work. See what I mean? So it would be a loss, you know?

Y: Yeah. Yeah, I'm interested to hear in differences between the mill job you did, and then later Raytheon. Did you feel, did you need any training to do that checking [unclear]?

P: Well they just showed me, they just showed me. In fact they thought I was smarter then I actually was, which I'm not, you know? Because they told me, the boss said, we're going upstairs, we're changing around, we want you for a supervisor. See? I know I couldn't handle it. I didn't have enough education, you know? I knew that. So I quit. [Chuckles] I says I (--). And then the commuting was too much for me, you know? You know you work [unclear] and your on the road you know, seventy, eighty miles a day, you know. It gets pretty damn (--)

Y: What about the work place? Was it any difference, uh, different?

P: Well the work place was, well it's entirely different from the mill. It was too easy for me.
(Y: Too easy) For me. I was always a guy that likes to work.

Y: Physical also.

P: Yeah, I like, I like to keep going. I like to keep going, you know?

Y: Yeah.

P: I'm a guy who liked, you know, because I worked as a, in a store Tuesday and Saturday nights to make a couple of bucks. You now, because I used to give my mother my envelope sealed, you know? See what I mean?

Y: You did not open it?

P: No. I used to give it to her because they needed it, you know? I realize that we needed it, see? And so I used to work, Sunday mornings I either go shining shoes, Tuesday and Saturday I'd work in a [unclear]. I worked for about eight years there. When people find you were having fun, I was working. See? And uh, (--)

Y: So the job was easy for you? Just check your needle and (--)

P: Yeah, yeah, it was easy. Just put a tube in, wabble it around you know. And I used to tell Tom, the night boss, I say, cripe, can't you find something else for me to do? I said, Jesus Christ, I get so bored doing nothing, you know?

Y: Did you do eight hours, that kind of a job? (P: Yeah) Eight hours just follow the needle whether it is rejected or not?

P: Yeah, get a tube, put it in there, check it, and those are rejects, you put it one way, those are the good, you put them on another place. See? And it was boring to me. I said, can't you find something? Well he said, you can't. I says, can I fix some of these chairs, and (--) He says, the union won't allow it. See? So what I used to do, I used to polish up the machine for the girls, you know, the spokes, you know? I used to keep polishing them up you know, just to have something to do, you know?

Y: So you were not satisfied then. I mean you got paid, but uh (--)

P: No, I wanted, I wanted to (--)

Unknown voice: If you'll excuse me. (Y: Yeah, please) I'm going to go see Angie.

Y: I mean that is the kind of things I would like to hear. So you are not happy in other words, or you are happy, or you are satisfied, or uh (--)

P: No, I wanted more to do.

Y: You wanted more to do?

P: Yeah. I was so used to working you know, hard, you know?

Y: How did you feel then? I mean after working so physically and with your hands, and suddenly you sit there and just your eyes?

P: Didn't, didn't, I didn't like it. I didn't like it. Because that's why I could have worked in the store. You know the guy wanted me to work for him steady, (Y: Yeah) but I didn't want to, because I didn't mind when I was selling, but when I was just waiting for a customer, I didn't like it, you know? I didn't like it you know.

Y: Yeah. How long did you work there? (P: In the store?) Raytheon.

P: Raytheon? Oh, about three months, that's all. (Y: Why so short?) Why? Well, well then I was looking for my old job, you know? (Y: Where, Arlington?) So I got into the same type of job in Lowell, and in North Chelmsford. See? They had this wool shop there, you know? And I got in there and I worked in there for about six months until it folded, see?

Y: So you moved from Raytheon to, back at uh (--)

P: To the wool, to the wool shop.

Y: Wool shop. (P: Yeah) Why? Because you were not satisfied, or because you got more paid, or because you (--)

P: Both. I was dissatisfied, and I got more pay as a sorter, as a wool sorter, you know? (Y: Yeah) Yeah. So then the place was folded up like they all did fold up, you know? (Y: Umhm) So I met a guy on Essex Street, and he told me he was the guy that used to take charge of the Nichols and Company. We did a lot of work, millions of wool, million upon millions of pounds a week, you know? And he said, I asked him, I said, how are things looking? He says, they're going to fold up. But he says the mills are folding up. So uh, when I heard that, I hear this Mariner got into the Arlington Mill. But it was a different type of Wool Shop now. You know, it was more machine on a belt, but I, I talked, I went and talked to the boss, you know, and I had quite a talk and he hired me, you know. So I stayed there.

Y: Those uh, you know, you said that you helped girls to polish the things, and so forth, so you obviously talked to people around you, girls or boys, or whatever. Uh, were, did they feel the same way you did?

P: No! No. (Y: No?) They were happy at their jobs.

Y: Why, because uh(--) (P: Well they) Because they did not work in the mills like you, or (--)

P: Well you see, I'm a different guy. That's all! You know what I mean? (Y: Yeah, yeah)
Some people like soft jobs.

Y: No, I thought maybe because you came from the mills it made a difference. (P: No. No, no, no, no, no.) Did they also come from uh (--)

P: A lot of them must have come from mills up around there. I know a lot of them, Lawrence people that came from the mills. They like it there, you know? The only think is, we're different people, you know what I mean? You know?

Y: Yeah. And uh, you said uh, when you went to Lowell then the machines were different. I mean uh, I remember reading books, or articles, they talk about the modernization of the machines. So it wasn't like you know, in 1930, and later in 1940, 50, they, more and more they got (--)

P: Oh, they modernized the machine, see?

Y: Modernized their machines.

P: Yeah, see, but I wouldn't know too much. But I know that they modernized them even when I was in the mill they started to get the motors, electric motors, you know, they started, you know? But then I never worked in them departments anymore. You see what I mean? See? But they must have been all automatic, you know. All electrified, you know?

Y: Yeah, I was wondering if it required more attention? Or I mean the modern machines, did it require more quickness, or how did it uh, do you see what I mean? I'm more interested in those kind of changes. You know, did it require more quickness, or more skill, or more attention?

P: Yeah, I wouldn't know that.

Y: You wouldn't know that.

P: Because I, I didn't work there anymore. Where I worked there was no machinery. See? (Y: right) It was all hand work, you know?

Y: Right. That's why you have a strong body today.

P: Yeah, well I, well I used to be pretty good, you know.

Y: How did you go to work when you worked in Arlington? Did you live close to Arlington, or (--)

P: Well not that close.

Y: How long did you walk one way?

P: But one way, oh I'd say a mile and a half one way.

Y: Well that uh, (--)

P: One and a half to two miles, you know?

Y: One hour at least.

P: Yeah, well I used to love to walk. I was a great walker.

Y: Yeah, that's healthy. I also like walking.

P: Yeah, yeah, if I could walk. Now it's the conditions of course. But I used to love to walk. I see myself when I was a young man, and I'd loaf a lot, you know? Being out of work, and my friends would be working. I'd be alone. And I didn't want to go in a bar and drink, and hang around. You know, I could go in a bar and have a drink of beer, but I don't want to hang around a bar? See what I mean? (Y: Yeah) And uh, I figured, what the hell am I going to do? So I'd walk. I'd walk maybe, I'll bet you some says I walked fifteen, eighteen miles. I'd go, I'd start off all the way, Essex, Broadway, come around into Methuen. Go all away around there and do that probably three, four times a day. [Chuckles]

Y: Yeah. So you did not mind walking. (P: No, I used to love to walk) But if you wanted could you find a place next by, next to Arlington? Close to your work place?

P: You mean if I wanted to move there? (Y: Yeah) Well I loved where I, where I lived. It was nice and quiet.

Y: Which was where?

P: Belmont Street, you know? (Y: Oh Belmont Street, yeah) Yeah. Oh, it used to be a nice, nice place see?

Y: Was it an Italian community in Belmont Street?

P: No. No. (Y: No?) No, no, no. In fact there was only two Italian families in the whole, in the whole street.

Y: I thought you know, people lived together more or less.

P: They used to. They used to in the old days.

Y: But in 19, 1930, in the thirties you were uh (--)

P: Oh, they're starting to spread out, you know?

Y: Yeah.

P: Yeah, but you're taking, in the earlier years, Christ sake, all the people from Sicily around one [unclear], people from Naples, another, the Irish were in South Lawrence, you know? The French on Water Street, you know? The Dutch gap was the German's, and maybe they'd be a couple of Poles you know, scattered, you know? The Polish people around, oh, they were all, it was always the case, you know, they were all mixed in there.

Y: How did you find your wife, may I ask that?

P: How did I find my wife?

Y: I mean did you, was it like today, dating? Or parents recommended arranged marriage, or (--)

P: No, we didn't have no arranged marriage. But I'll tell you what? My wife, see, there's a funny thing, see? We're, my brother is married to her sister, to my wife's sister. And my sister, the one that's at the hospital, was married to my wife's brother. You know, we got acquainted through my brother's older brother, going with, getting married to this woman. And we got acquainted in the group, you know what I mean. And that's how it happened, you know?

Y: I mean before you met her, didn't you mess around with girls?

P: Well I'll tell you the truth, I was very shy. That's a fact. You know, there was a girl, I think of her every night. The first girl, (Y: Italian?) yeah, Italian girl. Oh, she was wonderful. And you know, I know she liked me, and I worked with her. And one time as she was going by, you know, I'd give her quite a look. And some of the girls must have told her the way I looked. And whoever she is, she used to give me the big smile. But I was too, too shy to talk to her. See, now I'm, you know, old, you know, I can't, I kid around, but in them days I was very very shy.

Y: She was in the mill, working in the mill? You knew her from the mills?

P: I knew her the first time I worked in the Ayer Mill? Then at the Print Works. I worked in the Print Works too for a little while. For a little while. (Y: Yeah) Yeah, that's a cotton mill.

Y: So you, you did not take her out?

P: No, I never asked. I never even said hello to her. I was so shy.

Y: So before you got married you did not date any, any girls?

P: Well I dated one, but that's all.

Y: Yeah, in those days I guess you did not ask Irish girls, or Polish girls, you rather ask Italians?

P: No, I asked, I asked a French girl. (Y: Oh yeah?) Yeah, a Canadian girl. Oh yeah. You

would, you know, the only thing is this, see? With me was, that due to being a sap, see, (Y: Sap, what does he mean, sap?) stupid. See? Working as I showed you in the store, Tuesday night and Saturday, I should have learned to dance. I never learned to dance. See? Where I could have met a lot of girls, and you know (--)

END OF TAPE.